



Royal College of
Obstetricians &
Gynaecologists

Ms Nadine Dorries MP
Minister of State
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

6th September 2021

Dear Ms Dorries,

Confidential enquiry into the deaths of Asian and Asian British babies

We are writing to you to ask if your Department will urgently fund a much-needed confidential enquiry into the deaths of Asian and Asian British babies.

As highlighted by the recent report from the Health and Social Care Committee “The improvements in rates of stillbirths and neonatal deaths are good but are not shared equally among all women and babies. Babies from minority ethnic or socioeconomically deprived backgrounds continue to be at significantly greater risk of perinatal death than their white or less deprived peers.”

We welcome your commitment to reducing inequalities in perinatal outcomes and believe investment in this enquiry would be a cost-effective way of realising that commitment.

We are concerned that despite recent improvements, the current trajectory in reducing the rate of stillbirths means the Government will be a long way off achieving the National Maternity Safety Ambition to reduce stillbirths and neonatal deaths by 50% by 2025.

Compared with white babies, stillbirth rates for Black/Black British babies are twice as high, and, for Asian/Asian British babies they are 1.6 times as high. For babies from the most deprived families, stillbirth rates are 1.7 times higher than from the least deprived.

We know that confidential enquiries have been crucial in driving down maternal and perinatal death rates in some groups. These rapid reviews of case notes conclude within a finite period of time and with solid recommendations. Previous confidential enquiries, for example into term stillbirths and deaths in labour, have transformed understanding of the changes that are needed to make care safer and contributed significantly to reducing deaths in those groups.

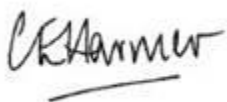
We are delighted that a confidential enquiry into deaths of Black and Black British babies is underway and will report at the end of 2022. However, we are very concerned that a confidential enquiry into the deaths of Asian and Asian British babies, proposed at the same time, will not be going ahead, as NHS England have been unable to find funding for it. We believe this is a missed opportunity to make real headway in ensuring that the National Ambition is met.

In 2019, almost twice as many Asian babies died, there were 665 Asian baby deaths compared to 366 Black baby deaths. If funding could be made available for the enquiry into Asian and Asian British baby deaths to start as soon as possible, it will report shortly after the enquiry in to the deaths of Black and Black British babies, meaning that learning across both enquiries could be put in to practice a number of years before the 2025 deadline. There is significant benefit in running both enquiries at the same time so that learning which is applicable to both groups can be implemented at the same time. This would also overcome a basic unfairness that would result if the Asian population has to wait to get care that would benefit both groups. The ONS have also highlighted that for Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups the pattern of cause of death differs from other groups, with higher rates of death due to congenital abnormalities, so it is also important to find out quickly if there is specific learning to improve care in those groups. Delaying this enquiry by two years, as has been suggested, would mean that it would not report until the end of 2024, leaving scant time to achieve the aim of reducing the numbers of babies dying by 50%.

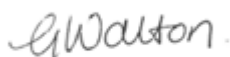
Should you require further information, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with you. To arrange meeting, please contact Jess Reeves at Sands on jessica.reeves@sands.org.uk or 07879 897 248.

We look forward to your reply at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,



Clea Harmer, Chief Executive, Sands



Gill Walton, Chief Executive, The Royal College of Midwives



Angela McConville, Chief Executive, NCT



Edward Morris, President, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists